

Editorial in the N. Y. med. Rec.

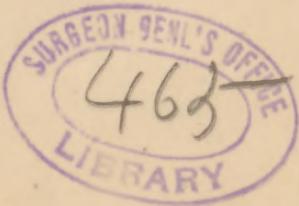
Editorial in the New York Medical Record,

December 27, 1879.

THE LUNACY REFORM MEETING.

THE public meeting of citizens to discuss the subject of lunacy reform was held on December 18th, as announced, and was very successful in every way. Speeches were made by Mr. Geo. W. Curtis, Dr. Bellows, Dr. Storrs, and Dr. E. C. Seguin ; letters were read from Dr. Willard Parker, Mr. Sewall, and Mr. Frank B. Sanborn and Hon. Dorman B. Eaton. Full reports of these have appeared in the daily press, and we need not go into any details about them now.

The speeches were, in their general character, entirely devoid of personality or inflammatory appeals ; but were, nevertheless, extremely earnest and determined in calling for reform. It was shown very clearly that our asylum system is imperfect and behind that of other countries ; it was shown, further, that the care of the insane is a branch of public service that, above all others, needs to be kept constantly before the public eye ; and it was shown that the State and city are expending immense and continually increasing sums on the insane, without having yet secured adequate provision for them. These facts, without taking into account the more special



evils, were found sufficient reason to urge the formation of a Board of Lunacy Commissioners; and the securing such a board was made the particular object of the meeting. At its conclusion, resolutions were adopted recommending to the Legislature the establishment of such a board, and appointing a committee to frame a bill covering that end.

The same committee was authorized to set on foot the organization of a National Association for the Protection of the Insane. Such an association will undoubtedly be of great service, as furnishing a nucleus for further effort, and giving an assurance that the work of reform is not spasmodic, but is placed on a broad and permanent basis.

Much wisdom was shown in the concentration of the efforts of those wishing Lunacy reform upon a single object—that of securing a lunacy commission. Such a board we have before advocated as being an essential in reform, and it now appears to be the first and wisest step that can be taken in that direction.

With an efficient Board of Lunacy Commissioners, raised above political influences, and furnished with proper authority, every improvement possible in asylum management can be expected to be brought about in good time.

The tone and management of the meeting showed that wisdom had been gained from the wretched experience of last winter. No petty and personal charges were made, but the demand for reform and for a lunacy board to initiate and perpetuate it was based on the unassailable ground of the helplessness of the insane, the rights of the citizen, and the success of lunacy boards elsewhere.

It is to be hoped that the work begun by this meeting will not be dropped. If placed in energetic and fearless hands, with the impetus public spirit has now given it, we may expect before long to find the care of our insane becoming less of a reproach to medical science, and of an offence to humanity.

Editorial in the New York Medical Record,  
January 17, 1880.

---

THE ADDRESS OF THE STATE COMMISSIONER IN LUNACY.

We have referred to the fact that an address was delivered by Dr. Ordronaux, January 6th, before a distinguished audience, at the residence of Dr. C. R. Agnew. The earnest efforts which Dr. Agnew has made for a number of years to secure insane asylum reform, are well known, and have always invited our sympathy and commanded our respect. Hence we were led to expect that the call for the meeting referred to was of more than usual significance, and promised more than ordinary results. Perhaps because so much was expected, we realized our disappointment the more. We say this in all truth and charity towards our accomplished and esteemed friend, the Commissioner of Lunacy.

Dr. Ordronaux delivered an address which was learned and interesting, and marked by those rhetorical graces and felicities of expression which always characterize his remarks. He traced the origin of insane asylums abroad and in this country, and showed how much had been done everywhere for the insane, but more especially in New York. The amount of money expended in our State upon this class, and the perfection of the laws concerning the insane, were dwelt upon. The speaker concluded by saying that,

as regards reform, none was needed, for there were no abuses to correct; or if there were a few in the county asylums, these could only be effected as the lapse of time brought about a change in public sentiment. Some very unpleasant things were intimated in regard to those persons who were ignorantly and hastily agitating the subject.

Dr. Ordronaux is a person whom official position gives weight to his words, and whose character raises him above all petty insinuations or attacks. But his statement that no reform is needed, that agitation is uncalled for, and that the agitators are either foolish or malicious, must naturally arouse some positive emotions of opposition. Have we, then, been mistaken in all our facts and statements? Did not our Governor condemn the extravagance in asylum buildings? Has not the Chairman of the State Board of Charities eloquently lamented the condition of the county insane? Could anything more scathing have been said by the English visitor to our asylums, Dr. Bucknill? If everything is perfect, why was a commissioner sent to Europe to study asylums there, and bring back advice and suggestions, which have not been acted on? In the recent message of the Governor to the State Legislature, he says: "The condition of the insane in the poorhouses of the State is pitiable in the extreme, and urgently demands attention." We heard nothing about this from Dr. Ordronaux. Does the commissioner wish the present mammoth asylum system perpetuated? Are acute and chronic cases still to be huddled together in vast colonies? He has admitted in his own reports that the number of insane in the State is increasing out

of proportion to the population. Shall we make no changes for these in the future?

As for the imputations cast upon those who are seeking reform, there is no one whose reputation needs defence, and charges cannot be disposed of so easily. There is the best of evidence that the organization of insane asylums needs improvement, and that the medical treatment of the insane is not what it should be.

The question of the care of our insane is a very great one; it still needs discussion; there are problems in it yet to be solved, and changes in the present system that will have to be secured. Dr. Ordronaux made a mistake in substituting a historical review for a critical and practical discussion of the subject. The agitation concerning it has gone too far to be stopped by assuming indifference or attempting to ignore the points at issue. We admit him to be right in one respect—that he urges in an impassive way the stirring up of public sentiment, not the attacking of officials. This is the ground we have taken ourselves; but public sentiment will not be aroused by folding the hands and disclaiming all need of reform.

The best endorsement of the propriety of the recent meeting at Cooper Union, and of the necessity of further agitation, is this address by the State Commissioner in Lunacy.

